

Message

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Subject: Inside EPA article, April 28, 2017: Auto Sector Said To Press EPA, DOT To 'Get Moving' On Vehicle GHG Review

<https://insideepa.com/daily-news/auto-sector-said-press-epa-dot-get-moving-vehicle-ghg-review>

Daily News

Auto Sector Said To Press EPA, DOT To 'Get Moving' On Vehicle GHG Review

April 28, 2017

The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers met April 27 with both Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao and EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, discussing topics including “consumer and market trends,” which automakers have cited as one reason to pursue more flexibility under vehicle greenhouse gas and fuel economy regulations. One source with knowledge of the meetings says automakers also pressed Trump administration officials to take the next steps to reopen EPA's mid-term review of vehicle GHG and fuel economy rules, after officials last month agreed to reconsider an 11th-hour Obama EPA decision to retain standards for model years 2022-2025.

Although the administration announced its review last month, it has taken few administrative steps since then, possibly as a result of a lack of political appointees at the agency.

“The purpose of the meetings was to encourage them to get moving,” the knowledgeable source says, noting there are indications the industry is getting nervous about the slow pace of action.

The auto industry trade group, however, is downplaying the discussion as “largely an introductory meeting” that coincided with its first board meeting since the Trump administration took office.

“This is a normal part of our board agenda,” an auto alliance spokesman said in a statement.

“This is their first board meeting since the inauguration, so with a new EPA [administrator] and DOT [secretary], something like this to be expected.”

Several sources tracking the issue say automakers took part in separate meetings with Chao and Pruitt on April 27.

The first knowledgeable source says the meetings came after an informal dinner the previous evening with alliance members and White House energy adviser Mike Catanzaro.

The dialogue between automakers and EPA and DOT comes over a month after President Donald Trump announced during a March 15 appearance in Detroit a plan to “cancel” the Obama EPA's January decision to keep its GHG standards in place. That decision in part responded to automaker claims that the Obama administration truncated a promised mid-term review of the standards that had been slated for completion in 2018.

The administration released a formal notice signed by both Pruitt and Chao in which EPA stated its intent to issue a new determination on whether to retain or scrap its MY22-25 GHG standards. But public actions to implement the rule reopening process has been scant since then, as the Trump administration is delayed in getting personnel into key posts at federal agencies.

More broadly, the success of the effort could depend on overcoming California's leverage to move ahead with the existing standards. The Golden State has an existing waiver under the Clean Air Act that allows it to issue standards that are stricter the federal levels, though the Trump administration has signaled it could be planning to eventually target that waiver or refuse to issue future ones.

'Start Your Rollbacks'

The auto industry has also been wrestling with how to present their case publicly for more flexibility under the standards without being seen as endorsing “rollbacks” of the standards or of a national approach to vehicle GHG and fuel economy controls.

The knowledgeable source says it is unclear that significant new ground was broken in the April 27 meetings, but that the initial meetings with Chao and Pruitt are consistent with the broader industry goal of seeking Trump administration cooperation in negotiations with California over more flexible regulations.

A DOT spokesperson said Chao's meeting with the auto alliance touched on a broad array of issues, including the “mid-term evaluation for auto fuel efficiency” but also “safety, technological advances, and overall consumer and market trends”

The discussion with the automakers also focused on the “benefits that can result from new vehicle safety features and autonomous vehicles that have the potential to help improve overall roadway safety and mobility for the traveling public,” the spokesperson said.

While automakers are releasing few details of the discussions, some environmentalists say the meetings show the wait for further Trump administration action is likely over.

“Gentlemen, start your rollbacks,” Safe Climate Campaign's Daniel Becker told *Inside EPA* in reaction to the meeting. -- *Doug Obey* (dobey@iwpnews.com)